You Asked

When was the protestant Bible of 66 Books first recognized as the official closed cannon of Scripture?

Gemini 3.5 Flash Extended

Because Protestantism is decentralized, there is no single date or council that universally closed the 66-book canon for all Protestants at once. Instead, the 66-book Bible (comprising the 39 books of the Hebrew proto-canon and the 27 books of the New Testament) was officially recognized as an exclusive, closed canon through a series of **Reformation-era confessions during the 16th and 17th centuries**.

This formalization was accelerated as a direct counter-response to the Roman Catholic **Council of Trent (1546)**, which had officially declared the Vulgate—including the deuterocanonical/apocryphal books—to be the infallible, closed canon of the Catholic Church.

The historical milestones where Protestant bodies formally defined and closed the 66-book canon include:

1. The Belgic Confession (1561)

This is the earliest major Protestant confession to explicitly list the modern 66-book canon.

- **Article 4** lists the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament by name.
- **Article 6** explicitly names the apocryphal books (such as Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, and Maccabees), stating that while the church may read them for instruction, they "do not have such power and virtue that one could confirm from their testimony any article of faith."

2. The Thirty-Nine Articles of religion (1562/1571)

In the English-speaking world, the Church of England formalized its canon in **Article VI**. It explicitly listed the canonical books of the Old Testament (matching the 39 books of the Hebrew Bible) and stated that all 27 books of the New Testament were received as canonical. It relegated the Apocrypha to a secondary status—useful for "example of life and instruction of manners," but not for establishing doctrine.

3. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)

The most definitive, strict closing of the 66-book canon in English Protestantism occurred here.

- **Chapter 1, Paragraph 2** lists exactly the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments as the sole inspired Word of God.
- **Chapter 1, Paragraph 3** completely strips the Apocrypha of any ecclesiastical status, stating they are "not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of the Scripture, and therefore are of no authority in the Church of God, nor to be any otherwise approved, or made use of, than other human writings."

The Role of Bible Printing

While these confessions established the theological boundary, the visual reality of a 66-book physical volume took longer to standardize. Early Protestant Bibles (including Martin Luther's 1534 German Bible and the 1611 King James Bible) actually included the Apocrypha, placing them in a separate section between the Testaments. It wasn't until the **1640s** (under Puritan influence) and later institutionalized by the **British and Foreign Bible Society in 1826** (which refused to fund the printing of Bibles containing the Apocrypha) that the physical 66-book format became the absolute standard for Protestant Bibles globally.